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General Assembly

Official Records

Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space

403rd Meeting
Tuesday, 14 June 1994, 3 p.m.
Vienna

Chairman: Mr. Hohenfellner . . . . . (Austria)

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Spin-off benefits of space technology: review of current status

The Chairman: Since no other member wishes to speak on this item, the Committee has concluded its consideration of agenda item 8.

Organization of work

The Chairman: I should like to inform the Committee that I am determined to conclude the debate on agenda item 9 by tomorrow morning at the latest. During tomorrow morning's meeting I should also like to take up the question of the adoption of the first part of the report in informal consultations.

That means that I shall not allow delegations to extend their statements into tomorrow afternoon, because I want to save the time and money of Member States by reducing the use of conference services. I must also say that I am disappointed by the fact that we have only one speaker for this afternoon's meeting. On Friday afternoon we held extensive informal consultations on how we could improve our working methods. I do not want to share secrets with anyone who did not participate in the informal consultations, but one of the real problems we have is that delegations are not prepared to speak in the time available. Hence, I would urge members to speak as soon as possible, preferably this afternoon, under the relevant agenda item.

In any case, let me repeat my intention to conclude the debate on agenda item 9, "Other matters", tomorrow morning. Then, after the conclusion of agenda item 9, we shall immediately take up the adoption of the report in informal consultations, since I want to make the best use of the time available to the Committee.

Other matters

Mr. Sölendil (Turkey): Perhaps I am taking a risk in putting myself forward as the first speaker on such a controversial issue. I hope others will follow.

I wish to reiterate briefly Turkey's position on the membership issue, to be recorded verbatim.

Turkey became a member of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS) in 1977, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 32/196 B of 20 December 1977. On the basis of a gentleman's agreement within the Group of Western European and Other States in 1980, Turkey agreed to share its seat with Greece on a three-year rotation period. Thus, we last yielded our seat to Greece in 1993.

This agreement was reached on the understanding that a solution to the rotation system would soon be found. Unfortunately, this has not been the case for 14 years.

Now, as with the other rotating countries, we reiterate our request for the termination of this rotation system so as to allow us to enjoy our membership permanently. We believe that COPUOS should put an end to this unusual situation at this session.

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On this occasion, my delegation expresses its gratitude to you, Mr. Chairman, for your valuable efforts on this difficult issue, and reiterates its full support for your approach to the settlement of the problem.

Thus, the working paper contained in document A/AC.105/1994/CRP.4 seems acceptable to us as a way of setting the process in motion and should be included in the report of the Committee.

Mr. Peranhos Velloso (Brazil): I would like to make a statement under agenda item 9 to state some points of a very general nature which, in the view of the Brazilian delegation, deserve careful consideration.

At the outset, we deem it appropriate to refer to the question of the working methods of the Committee, and in particular of the Legal Subcommittee.

The Brazilian delegation is in complete agreement with the manner in which you, Mr. Chairman, have conducted the current session. The flexibility demonstrated by the Chair reflects the high regard you personally have for the concerns expressed by many delegations, without any compromise as to the efficiency of our Committee.

The informal consultations held last Friday on the question of working methods produced, in our opinion, very significant and important results. In an atmosphere of transparency and openness, we were able - through a process of collective brainstorming - to reflect on where the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space stands today and where we would like it to be in the future.

Especially timely was the decision to recommend that the Chairman of the Legal Subcommittee hold, at its next session, consultations on the working methods of that subsidiary body, including the definition of possible new agenda items. This, we believe, is a good starting-point for properly addressing the question of efficiency in COPUOS and its Subcommittees.

The Brazilian delegation also had the opportunity to state its views on an expansion of the membership of the Committee in yesterday's informal meeting.

We are fully supportive of the Chairman's proposal that an expansion be limited to no more than eight new members, be geographically balanced and be approved by consensus. This carefully thought out formula seems to represent the best possible common ground among the members of the Committee regarding this subject.

In this light, statements calling for the establishment of criteria which have to be fulfilled by candidates sounded somewhat out of context. It appears indisputable that any interested State Member of the United Nations, irrespective of its stage of development in outer space science and technology, has a right to be considered for membership in COPUOS. After all, the foremost objective of COPUOS is to promote international cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space, to the benefit and in the interest of all mankind. Let us, therefore, do our best to avoid judgements and perceptions that might give rise to discrimination, undermining the very Committee we seek to protect and strengthen.

The Chairman: I thank the representative of Brazil for his readiness to use the conference services made available and to speak on this occasion.

Would any other delegation like to set an example by trying to improve our working methods and show flexibility by speaking under this agenda item?

Since that does not seem to be the case, I shall now call on Mr. Jasentuliyana who, on behalf of the Committee on Conferences, will convey some information to members, that is directly related to our working methods and their rationality.

Mr. Jasentuliyana (Director, Office for Outer Space Affairs): This is with regard to a communication received by the Chairman from the Chairman of the Committee on Conferences in which one of the matters raised is that Committees in receipt of verbatim records such as ours should look into the possibility of either discontinuing them or examining any other recommendation that would suit the Committee.

I have inquired of the Office of Conference Services, which states that one possible alternative might be that the Committee have only one multilingual record. In other words, the record would contain statements in the language in which they were delivered. The Committee's deliberations are also taped, so that the tapes may be used as a record.

The second alternative might be to have a full transcript of the verbatim records only in the working languages of the United Nations - English and French - plus the tapes. These are two possible alternatives.

I do not know whether the Committee at this time is in a position to agree on one of these alternatives or on any

discontinuation. Therefore, in the light of the consultations we had on Friday, it may be more prudent at this time to let the Working Group discuss this next year and then possibly make a recommendation. The Secretariat might at that time be in a position to propose other alternatives.

The Chairman: I agree with Mr. Jasentuliyana. I think that it would be very difficult, at this stage in the work of the Committee, to come to any conclusive decision or recommendation to follow either the first or the second alternative of the recommendations of the Committee on Conferences, because I heard delegations speaking up in the informal consultations and criticizing specifically the non-use, or the inadequate use, of other working languages of the United Nations. I am not going to interfere in these positions, because as Chairman I have to be absolutely impartial. I would suggest, therefore, that we include this - and have the Secretariat draft a relevant paragraph - on the agenda of the Working Group that will consider all the working methods, and also make a specific reference to the recommendations of the Committee on Conferences.

Before adjourning the meeting, I should like to remind representatives that we will start tomorrow at 10 sharp, as usual, to conclude our consideration of agenda item 9, and then begin consideration of the report in informal consultations. This is the so-called first reading in informal consultations of the first part of the report to be prepared by the Secretariat.

Mr. Hodgkins (United States of America): Will the report, or portions of it, be available tomorrow before the beginning of our meeting? Should we check with the distribution office?

Mr. Jasentuliyana (Director, Office of Outer Space Affairs): I am informed that normal distribution to the Missions will take place at 6 o'clock in the morning, and that the first part of the report will be available to delegations here in this room.

The meeting rose at 3.25 p.m.

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